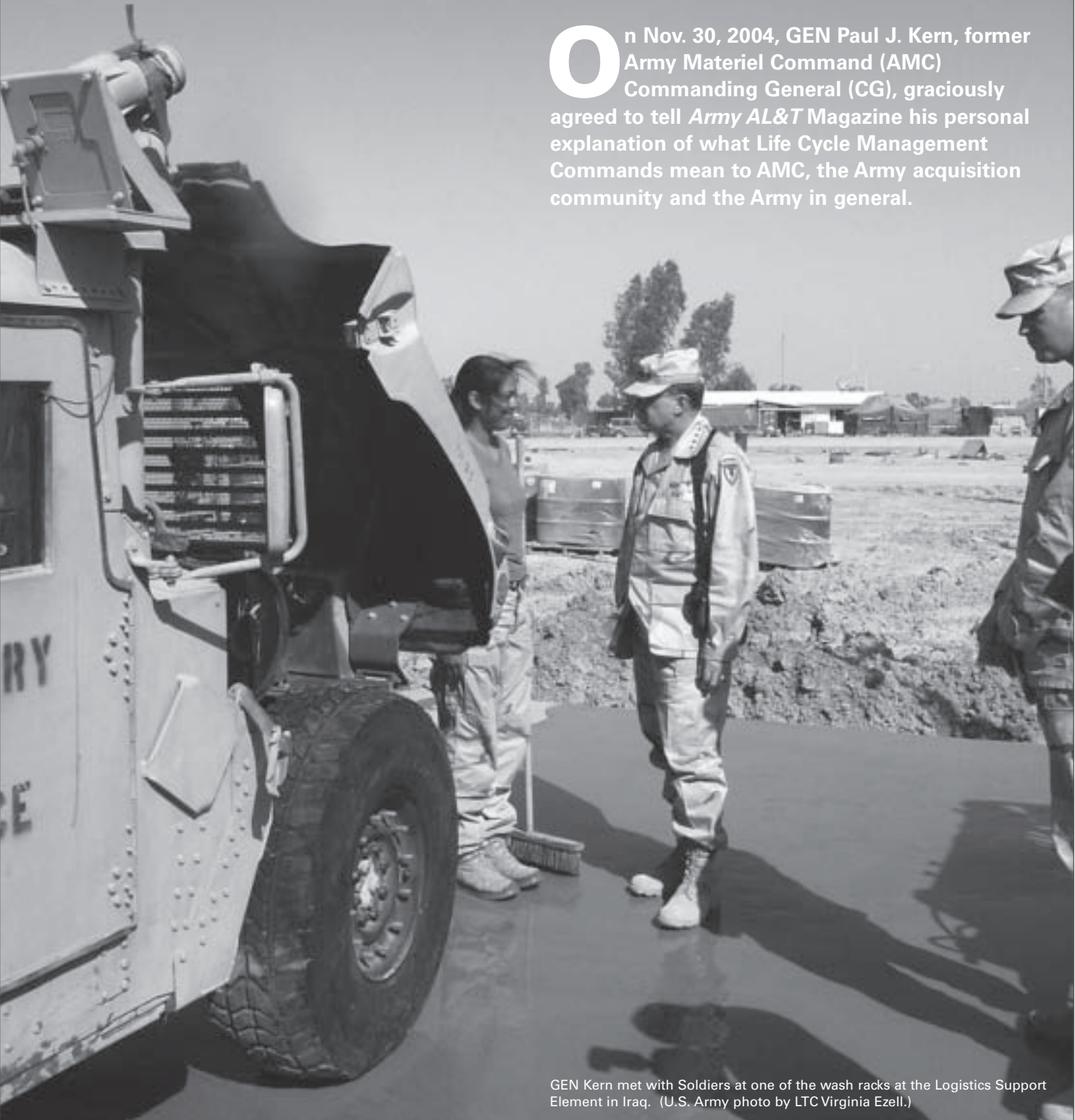


Exclusive Interview With General Paul J. Kern

Cynthia D. Hermes

On Nov. 30, 2004, GEN Paul J. Kern, former Army Materiel Command (AMC) Commanding General (CG), graciously agreed to tell *Army AL&T* Magazine his personal explanation of what Life Cycle Management Commands mean to AMC, the Army acquisition community and the Army in general.



GEN Kern met with Soldiers at one of the wash racks at the Logistics Support Element in Iraq. (U.S. Army photo by LTC Virginia Ezell.)

Army AL&T: Of the 12 program executive offices (PEOs), why were Aviation/Missiles, Communications/Electronics, Joint Ammunition and Soldier/Ground Systems selected to become the first four Life Cycle Management Commands (LCMCs)?

Kern: You have to start somewhere, so we looked at the major subordinate commands (MSCs) within the Army Materiel Command and the PEO structure's acquisition, logistics and technology side to determine where we could make the best use of the talented people we had and where we thought we could make the most progress. That's how we chose those four. And if you look at those PEOs, you'll see they are a significant focal point in the U.S. Army. The future of these LCMCs will depend on how each progresses and the estimate that is made by [Assistant Secretary of the Army for Acquisition, Logistics and Technology] Claude M. Bolton Jr., Military Deputy LTG Joseph L. Yakovac and [AMC CG] GEN Benjamin Griffin on what will be the best combinations to go forward with in the future.

Army AL&T: Are the other PEOs scheduled to become LCMCs as well? If so, what is the integration plan?

Kern: It wouldn't be correct to say they are scheduled right now. That's an assessment that Secretary Bolton and GEN Griffin will have to make. When they assess the LCMCs we started with, I'm sure it will result in future reorganization. As for the integration plan, LTG Yakovac and LTG [Richard A.] Hack [AMC DCG] have been working on developing that plan, which will be presented to Secretary Bolton and GEN Griffin for further action. There is a plan in the process of being built, but it hasn't been approved yet.

Army AL&T: What was the overriding factor or rationale that pointed to the need to establish the LCMCs?

Kern: When we say the words 'life cycle,' which we've used within the PM [program manager] community and within our review of logistics, it becomes clear that we really need an integrated approach from the research piece all the way through the disposal piece. And in today's Army, where the

FCS [Future Combat Systems] is evolving very quickly, we also see the need to bring some of that technology back into the current platforms. So the life cycle isn't something that we started with an Abrams tank in 1980 and then put on the shelf to dispose of in 2004.

In fact, the Abrams tanks are going to be in our inventory for probably another 20 years at least, maybe more. Therefore, we need to continually update the technology and make them adaptable so they can fit into the network battlefield and units of action and employment. That really drives us to look at a life-cycle approach to both old equipment, which will continue in operation for many years and needs to be upgraded, and new equipment that's coming onboard to ensure that we get the best performance-based contracts in place now that we're going to fit into this integrated life-cycle management.

Army AL&T: LCMCs are based on ever-greater collaboration among the acquisition, logistics, sustainment and technology communities. How are the Army Acquisition Executive (AAE), AMC CG and AMC DCGs encouraging collaboration?

Kern: It has been troubling to me for many years that we haven't had better integration processes, structures and so on. I'm thrilled to see that we are making progress. That is coming about through a series of reviews we began a few years ago that were jointly held between PEOs and AMC's MSCs, and held on a quarterly basis. Over a year's time, Secretary Bolton and I sat in on them. That evolved into the establishment of the LCMCs. Later, we'll make our assessments on how that will evolve through the communications between those two



GEN Kern made frequent trips to Southwest Asia during his command at AMC. (Photo by LTC Joe Bass.)

organizations and the continuously integrated metrics they use, the contracts that are written and the research that is introduced into future systems as well as current systems that need updating.

Army AL&T: For this issue of *Army AL&T* Magazine, each LCMC submitted an article about itself. Each LCMC will seek to improve its processes and encourage collaboration among its participating organizations. In your opinion, how will the LCMC commanders accomplish these two objectives?

Kern: I think they're off to a good start. To accomplish the objectives, they must continue the communications, mature those organizations and establish feedback mechanisms. Many of our metrics are historical rather than forward-looking, so we have to develop metrics that will allow us to see the impacts that we would like to see and look forward rather than backward. Currently, we need some metrics that reflect history to determine whether we're making improvements or not. But, it's a combination then of establishing the right metrics. I think we're making progress in that area after a long struggle of trying to know the right metrics in terms of measuring readiness and contract performance — not just how we're doing as far as parts on the shelf or percentages.

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effective commander's tool to manage life cycles.

Army AL&T: Some of the four new LCMCs have already been using Lean/Six Sigma concepts. Tell us your experience with Lean/Six Sigma at AMC and your view of it.

Kern: I'm enthusiastic about Lean/Six Sigma. We started it at AMC with a Lean production

Army AL&T: How will reestablishing the Deputies for Systems Acquisition (DSAs) in the four LCMCs lead to better inclusion of sustainment issues?

Kern: We've gone through a number of evolutions of this and learned that in some cases DSAs were successful and in some cases they were not. What the DSAs give us is an across-the-board life-cycle approach now as opposed to a few systems. This gives the life-cycle management commander the ability to rely on someone who can look across the entire spectrum of the life cycle and the acquisition process — not just at a Black Hawk, a 113 family or an old truck. So I see that as a real advantage — to take the lessons learned and apply them now to make a truly

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focus. We already had some Six Sigma work being done through the GE T700 engine rebuild in Corpus Christi, TX. When we laid that out across all our depots and at AMC headquarters, we recognized that Lean and Six Sigma must come together. Lean allows us to eliminate waste and look at the process side, and Six Sigma gives us the metrics needed to manage production quality standards and outputs. I think when the two are put together, there are many different definitions of what people expect. The part that I get enthusiastic about is that it's not a static view of how we're doing, in fact, it's a measurement of continuous improvement. We're always looking for better ways to go. We started Lean/Six Sigma in AMC depots at the production level, but the process is being used on the management side as well. There's a tremendous amount of improvement that can and should be made in how we manage our processes.

Army AL&T: Military equipment being used in Iraq and Afghanistan — from helicopters, Humvees and tracked vehicles to heavy trucks, Strykers and generators — have seen extensive use, which may require extensive overhauls or, quite possibly, lead to replacing portions of the fleet altogether. How will this scenario affect LCMCs in the future?

Kern: It gives us an opportunity to focus on the older equipment in our inventory, which will be in use for many more years, and to bring in the technologies from FCS and other areas into the current fleet of

equipment. It's a fleeting opportunity. In my view, this RESET operation, as we've labeled it, must focus not just on rebuilding something to an *old standard* but on taking advantage of the fact that we're rebuilding it to a *new capability* that will fit into the future network units of action.

Army AL&T: Secretary Bolton has advocated using a Life Cycle PEG [Program Evaluation Group] that looks at equipping, manning, installations, sustaining and training as a metric. What kinds of metrics do you think would help determine how well the LCMCs are performing their respective missions?

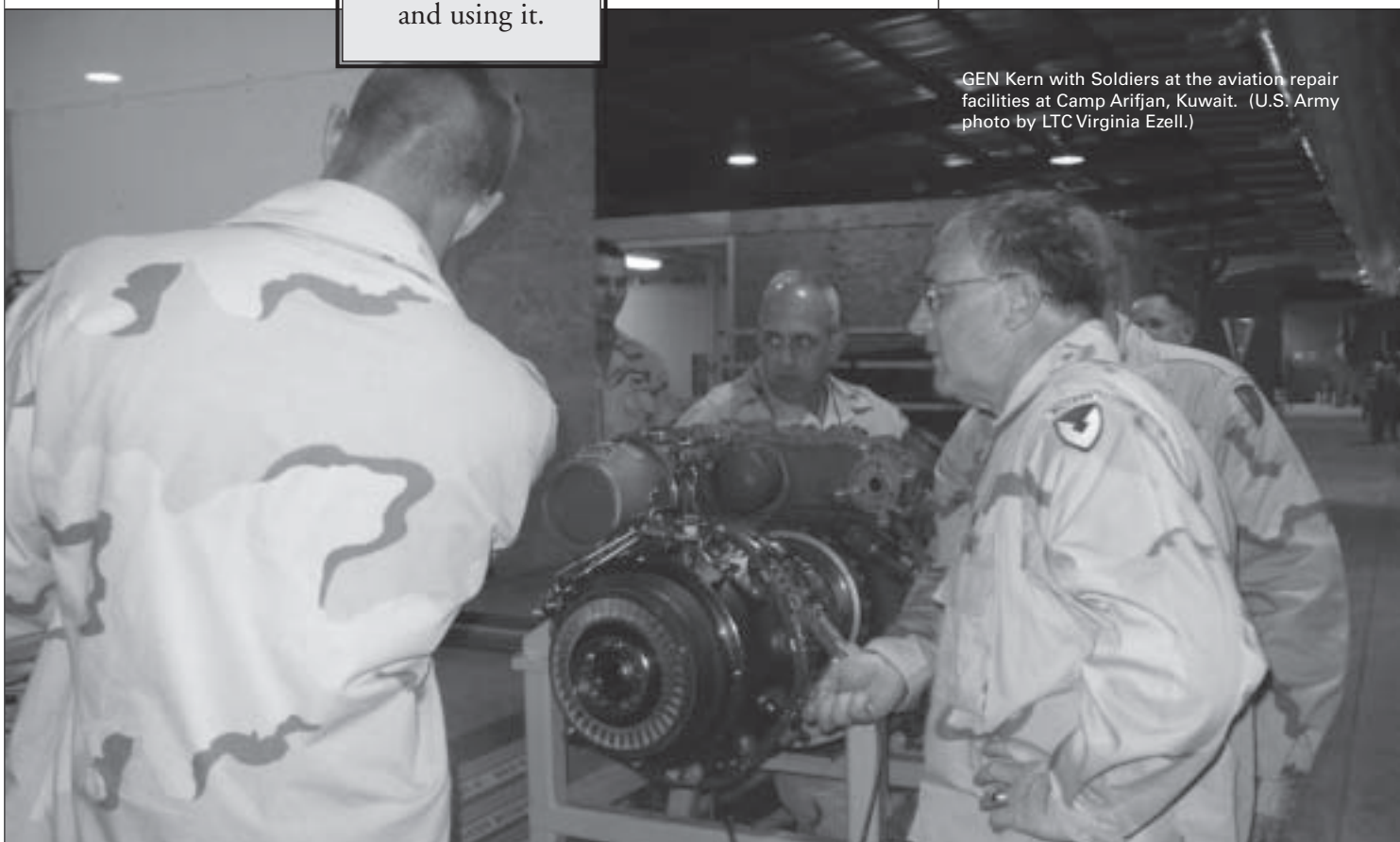
We must better manage the life-cycle programming and budgeting process, not just the equipment. ... The lesson we've learned from the commercial sector is that if we have a good data management system, we really must automate it or spend all our energy collecting data and not really analyzing and using it.

Kern: There are two parts. On the PEG, we've tried to do that for some years. If you go back and look at some of the logistics task force reviews of where we were about 3 years ago and look at where we are today, I think you'll see a convergence on the same thought of how we must better manage the life-cycle programming and budgeting process, not just the equipment. The life cycle implies that you have a programmatic view over a long time period, so I fully support that aspect of what Secretary Bolton has proposed.

Getting the right metrics also means that we must ensure that we are looking

forward. We've worked diligently to automate the data collection process in many of our digital systems, which is much easier to do now than it was in our old analog systems. The lesson we've learned from the commercial sector is that if we have a good data management system, we really must automate it or spend all our energy collecting data and not really analyzing and using it. We've got to get that process shift as well. But I think that Secretary Bolton has exactly the right idea in trying to bring the PEG piece together with the metrics to ensure that we're doing the right work. Another aspect that we've looked at for some time is the J.D. Powers approach to assessing input from the field — the real customers who are using our equipment — and how to feed that back into the system. That's a piece that we need to capture as well.

Army AL&T: When could we expect to start measuring results?



GEN Kern with Soldiers at the aviation repair facilities at Camp Arifjan, Kuwait. (U.S. Army photo by LTC Virginia Ezell.)

Kern: We've got to do it now. We can't wait. We must establish a baseline of where we are and work to continuously improve, so we've got to start with data collection and metrics right away.

Army AL&T: As you look back over your military career, what do you consider to be your crowning achievement, the legacy you will leave the U.S. Army?

Kern: I don't know that I could say that there's any one crowning achievement. I would like to believe that it's the people whom I've influenced into having an appreciation that change is a

good, not a bad, thing and that they may embrace continuous improvement as a way of life. This is a little bit counter to the culture of government, which likes to codify everything in regulations and policies that generally take more time to write than they do to actually derive benefits. If there's anything that I hope for, it's that people accept change and look for continuous improvement.

Army AL&T: What words of advice would you give to captains just beginning their careers in Army acquisition, logistics,

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sustainment or technology?

Kern: "Pay attention to Soldiers." I think that piece of advice would be the same regardless of where they decided to make their career. It's easy to get caught up in the processes, but what we do has only one outcome: to allow Soldiers to accomplish their jobs at winning America's wars. The real evaluation tool we should be using for ourselves — whether a captain, a general, a wage-grade worker, an SES or anywhere in between — is paying attention to what Soldiers say about how we provide them the resources they need to do their jobs.

Army AL&T: If I can be so bold as to ask, what are your retirement plans?

Kern: Work. The lesson to me is to work as long as you possibly can until

your body no longer allows you to. People who I've seen do that live longer and generally feel a lot happier about themselves. I'd caveat that with trying to spend a little more time with family than I have in the past 40 years.

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(U.S. Army photo by SGT Scott Meinhardt, DA Staff Photographer.)